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Public Testimony of Audrey Perlow,  
Staff Attorney at Health Law Advocates  
Before the Executive Office of Health and Human Services  
Office of Medicaid  
August 11, 2010

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Good afternoon. My name is Audrey Perlow and I am a staff attorney at Health Law Advocates. Health Law Advocates is a non-profit law firm dedicated exclusively to health care access for low- and middle-income consumers. Improving access to oral health care for adults and children has been a longtime priority for HLA and we are a member of the Oral Health Advocacy Taskforce.

Since the change in dental regulations went into effect on July 1<sup>st</sup>, our office has been inundated with calls from patients desperately seeking help obtaining dental care-with dentures being a common concern among patients.

The stories our clients share are heart-wrenching. Our clients are experiencing significant discomfort and pain due to their dental needs. For example, one 44 year-old woman with no teeth will not be able to obtain the dentures she was promptly expecting following her April 2010 extractions. She wears a mask when she needs to leave her home and she is embarrassed to visit her daughter's school. I had to call her yesterday and tell her I had exhausted all options and there was nothing I could do beyond refer her to a community health center-where she will likely wait many months for an initial appointment. As you can imagine, she was extremely upset. This is only one of many similar painful conversations my colleagues and I have had with clients over the past 40 days.

Poor oral health can lead to significant health problems, including increased severity of cardiovascular disease and diabetes, complications of immune disorders and cancers, increased incidence of premature and low-birth-weight babies, and low self-esteem. On a day-to-day basis, the pain caused by tooth decay can interfere with eating, speaking, learning, and working. Nationally, more than 51 million school-hours and 164 million work-hours are lost each year due to dental-related illnesses.

Given the serious impact of these cuts, and the long-lasting physical and mental impact they will have on Commonwealth residents, HLA supports the Oral Health Advocacy Taskforce's written testimony and joins them in strongly urging that you include a one-year sunset provision on these regulations that requires the Office of Medicaid to revisit changes in 130 CMR 420 by the start of the next fiscal year. The July 2010 dental cuts were implemented through emergency regulations

prior to public comment, but there are critical reasons and ample time to revisit the issue before July 2011.

Thank you.